

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector
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In today's story, we have the faithful Pharisee who does everything he's supposed to do and is grateful he is such a superior being, unlike the horrible tax collector.

Frankly, I've run across a few 21st century Pharisee folk. "Oh Lord I thank you that I am not like other people, like my neighbor who is out playing golf this morning, or my co-worker who belongs to a different political party and doesn't understand your will for our country. Or even that scruffy fellow two pews over. I am here every Sunday morning; I pay my pledge regularly and I am on three major church committees."

The Pharisee sees his standing before God to be a result of his own actions
The Jews felt that paying money to a "foreign" power was treason against God. Jewish tax collectors were considered to be the worst type of sinner.

Yet it is this Tax Collector who stands humbly and repentantly before God. He feels he is not worthy of God's grace whereas the Pharisee thinks he has somehow earned God's grace. It's "God have mercy on me a sinner", not hey God look at how I have earned your Grace, through my own good deeds and superiority.

And it's the Tax Collector who goes down to his house justified, not the Pharisee.
What is meant by justified? The doctrine of justification raises the question of how we reach a status of righteousness in God's eyes. The Pharisee trusted in himself for his own righteousness and the tax collector trusted in God's mercy and received righteousness. He did nothing to earn or deserve God's mercy. God's mercy was freely given to him, as it is to us.

In Romans Paul says "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us".

The Biblical translation known as The Message puts it this way: "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself you will become more than yourself."

So how is it that we become "more than ourselves"? I think perhaps it's by acknowledging humbly that we have been given certain gifts that can further God's kingdom. It is by being good stewards of those gifts and using them to be of maximum service to God and our fellow man.

It is good that the Pharisee tithed, (here it comes) as we all should, but then he bragged about it, which we should not, and thought it made him special.

So let's talk about tithing for a minute. If you are not giving the Biblical 10% tithe, I urge you to give one % more each year until you get there. Or try increasing your pledge by the cost of a cup of coffee each week and you've added about \$200 right there.

What about the time we donate to the church. That's as important as our financial support, and it doesn't hit our budget. There's lots to be done. There are notes to be written during the year to parishioners and people who support things like Camp Hope. We can do that at home while we watch a TV show. There are people in these pews who quietly donate a great deal of time to the church seeking no Pharisaic boasting rights.

There are approximately 810 adults in our directory. If even 400 of those adults gave one more hour a month to the ministry of Christ Church that would conservatively, over the course of a year, be the equivalent of the work of 2 full time staff people. (or, at least \$75,000/year, in salary and benefits)

I would love to know how many full time employees would be required to do the work that you, as volunteers, are already doing. I expect it's mind blowing. And yet, I do not hear these volunteers boasting about what they do.

When I happen to be around here during the week, I'm amazed at the people who are here doing some of the myriad of tasks that need to be done.

We do not pledge, or volunteer to earn God's approval, or God's grace as the Pharisee did. We've already got that. But we all need, I think, a sense of humility that we are allowed to serve, and gratitude for the opportunities to serve. But remember it's in the Cross of Christ I glory, not in my own works.

Instead of patting ourselves on the back let us be grateful that God gives us work to do and everything we need to respond to his call and to do the work he gives us to do, ever knowing that we will never be perfect and that's okay. And then we will, humbly, like the tax collector, go down to our homes justified, made right with God, by His never-ending Love and all-encompassing Grace.